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THE ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA

March-April 1991

A Report by the Staff of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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This report is based on the findings of staff members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe -- the Helsinki Commission -- who remained in Albania as an election observer team following the visit to that country of a high-level Commission delegation on March 27-28, 1991. This delegation was led by the Commission's Co-Chairman, U.S. Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ), and included U.S. Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM), also a member of the Commission, Representatives E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-FL), Bob McEwen (R-OH) and Robert K. Dornan (R-CA), as well as William D. Fritts, Jr., Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the Commerce Department representative on the Helsinki Commission.

The staff participated in the activities of the Commission delegation, which included meetings with Albania's President and First Secretary of the ruling Party of Labor, the head of the Central Election Commission, the Chairman of the Democratic Party of Albania, and the leader of the independent Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The observer team met on its own with other election, government, media and opposition party officials and human rights activists, and observed a Democratic Party rally in Tirane. On the eve of the elections, it travelled to Lezhe and Shkoder in northern Albania, where it met with polling committee members preparing their stations for election day and election officials at the zone level, as well as with the head of the executive committee of Shkoder district. On election day, March 31, the team observed the voting at polling stations in Tirane, including at the central military academy, as well as in the cities and neighboring villages of Elbasan, Librazhd, Pogradec and Korce. The team returned to Elbasan to observe the counting of ballots. The next day, it attended an assessment meeting with other election observers and the press conference of the Party of Labor. Prior to its departure, the team also visited the headquarters of the Democratic Party, where a post-election demonstration of support for the party, involving several thousand people, was in progress.

Other sources used for this report include translations of the Albanian press provided by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, U.S. and European press articles, Radio Free Europe reports and materials provided by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the Department of State.

The Commission staff participating in the election observer team express their appreciation to the Voice of America for providing an expert on Albanian affairs who served as interpreter and provided useful background information. They also thank the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs for coordinating the activities of foreign observers during the Albanian elections, as well as the State Department team in Albania for their assistance during the course of the Commission delegation visit and the subsequent stay of the observer team.

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SUMMARY

-- On March 31, 1991, Albania held its first multi-party elections since the 1920's. The elections were for the 250 seats in the unicameral People's Assembly. Runoff elections for the Assembly seats were held on April 7, and a second round was held for one seat on April 14. There were no direct elections for the President of Albania, who will be chosen instead by the People's Assembly. Local elections are currently scheduled for 1992 but may be moved forward.

-- The elections represent the most recent of many steps taken by Albania to reform its political system. Ruled since World War II by a communist leadership that has isolated the country from world affairs and brutally repressed its citizenry at home, Albania began a process of reform only in early 1990, the result primarily of dire economic conditions and the impact of the political changes which swept through Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. Increased popular pressure at home and criticism from abroad forced the Government to accelerate this reform process in late 1990, agreeing by December to tolerate independent, alternative political parties and to schedule multi-party elections.

-- The three months leading up to the elections were marked by an incredible degree of openness by Albanian standards, but continued government control of the media, financial resources and the political infrastructure, along with reported intimidation of opposition candidates, significantly marred the campaign period.

-- The voting and counting of ballots on election day were, in general, orderly and correct, although there were numerous complaints of irregularities and disturbing reports of intimidation of voters in the countryside.

-- The Party of Labor won a critical two-thirds of the Assembly seats, enabling it to maintain control of government, pass desired constitutional changes and choose the new President. The party did especially well in the countryside, where the rural population was more cautious on economic reform issues and more susceptible to both direct and indirect intimidation.

-- The leading opposition party, the Democratic Party of Albania, took just under one-third of the seats, winning most of the constituencies of the larger cities. While it expected to do better, the party has gained enough seats to become a vocal opposition in the Assembly under the direction of Chairman Sali Berisha, Gramoz Pashko and other party leaders.

Taken as a whole, the Albanian elections cannot be considered free and fair. This does not mean, however, that the irregularities, intimidation and other problems encountered were necessarily sufficient to invalidate the results. The Party of Labor may well have won a majority of seats even if the election environment had been more free and fair, although it is questionable whether it would have still achieved the two-thirds benchmark critical for passing constitutional changes. Nevertheless, the very holding of these multi-party elections was a definite step forward.

In the post-election period, the Democratic Party has refused to join the Party of Labor in any government coalition and has boycotted the Assembly until the perpetrators of a post-election crackdown on demonstrators which left several dead are identified.

One of the most important and unanswered questions at present is the situation within the Party of Labor. Many hard-line leaders won election to the Assembly, but the current President and Party First Secretary, Ramiz Alia, lost his seat, raising questions as to whether he can still lead the party and, if elected the new President as expected, will remain a powerful head of state.

With or without further reform efforts, additional unrest can be expected in Albania. The country is now open to contact with the rest of the world and in dire need of foreign economic assistance. However, a slowdown in the pace of change -- let alone any rollback in the reforms undertaken to date -- will certainly be resisted by the population, the youth in particular, lead to new waves of people seeking to leave the country and discourage foreign governments from extending any economic assistance other than purely humanitarian aid.

INTRODUCTION: THE SETTING

On March 31, 1991, Albania held its first multi-party elections since the 1920's. It was the last of the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe to hold such elections. Given the degree of political repression and lack of reform prior to 1990, however, Albania in many respects has had to advance farther to reach the stage of political pluralism -- and in a shorter period of time.

In order to understand the difficulties encountered in Albania during the election period as well as the outcome of the elections, it is essential to be aware of the historical, geographic and demographic setting in which they took place.

Background

Albania, situated between Greece and Yugoslavia on the Adriatic coast, is a relatively small country, with a population of just over three million and an area slightly larger than the State of Maryland. Its capital is Tirane. According to Albanian figures, 98 percent of the population is ethnically Albanian, linguistically subdivided into two dialects -the more populous, northern Ghegs and the more dominant (during most of the communist period), southern Tosks. Although some words have roots from neighboring Slavic, Greek, and Romance languages, the Albanian language, while Indo-European, is not closely related to any other and can be traced back to the ancient Illyrians, who are known to have lived in the Balkans as early as the second millennium B.C. (a fact often used by Albanians in regard to territorial disputes). The remainder of the population consists mostly of a Greek minority, although there are Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and a few other ethnic groups as well. The number of Greeks, the largest group, is unknown but was believed to be between 59,000 (the official figure) and 400,000 in 1990.

Reflecting Ottoman Turk, Greek, and Italian influences, Albania can also be divided by religious belief, with around 70 percent being Muslim, 20 percent Orthodox, and 10 percent Roman Catholic in background. However, religious observance was banned in Albania from 1967, when the Government claimed the country to be the world's first atheist state, until the reforms of 1990.

Albania has a long history of foreign occupation, which its current leaders have used to justify isolationist foreign policies and repression at home. It was the last Balkan state to achieve independence, freeing itself from centuries of rule by the Ottoman Empire in 1912. Being a mountainous, relatively inaccessible region, however, it has retained not only its linguistic uniqueness but the old, clan-oriented customs of the Albanian people as well. Ruled between the wars by King Zog, Albania was invaded by Italy in 1939 and ruled by a puppet regime until liberated by the Communists, led by Enver Hoxha and closely aligned with the Yugoslav Partisans under Josip Broz Tito.

1945-1989

Hoxha ruled Albania until his death in 1985. A devout and ruthless Stalinist, he sided with the Soviet Union when Tito broke from the communist bloc in 1948, only to break from the Soviets himself in the early 1960's, following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign and rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Albania then enhanced relations with the People's Republic of China until that country initiated post-Mao reforms and expanded ties with the United States in the late 1970's. Since that time, Albania has been largely isolated, although since Hoxha's death the country's new President, Ramiz Alia, has sought to improve Albania's international standing by establishing relations with a greater number of other countries and participating in joint meetings of the Balkan countries. Relations with neighboring Yugoslavia, however, have remained tense due to the situation in Kosovo, a province of the Republic of Serbia where ethnic Albanians constitute the overwhelming majority of the population.

Domestically, Albania became, and still is, the poorest country in Europe, although it has considerable mineral resources. Under communist rule, Albania was also the scene of probably the worst human rights abuses in Europe to continue throughout the post-World War II period. The Albanian Government strictly controlled the movement of Albanian citizens, both abroad and internally. For decades, those caught trying to cross the border were given harsh prison sentences if they were not shot and killed while trying to escape. The secret police (*Sigurimi*) remains a powerful and pervasive organization to this day, and an extensive system of prisons and labor camps was created for those who expressed even mildly dissenting views.

The actual number of political prisoners prior to 1990 is unknown; the Albanian Government acknowledged the existence of political prisoners for the first time in 1990, giving a figure of 83, in contrast to the 900-1,000 estimated by recent refugees or the 20,000-40,000 claimed by some foreign sources. Religion was prohibited by law in 1967. While the recognized Greek and Macedonian minorities have had some educational opportunities in their native language, there have been attempts to suppress their cohesiveness and cultural identity.

1990-1991

In 1990, several developments forced Albania to move away from its policies of isolation and repression. From the top of the power structure, President Alia was leading a reform faction in the Communist leadership that has gradually gained strength vis-a-vis such remaining hard-liners as former Politburo member and Party Secretary Simon Stefani and Hoxha's widow, Nexhmije Hoxha, who headed the party affiliated organization, the Democratic Front. Moreover, the country's economy, already in bad condition, began a steep and evident decline at about this time.

From below, Albanians who do have televisions and radios were able to receive local Greek, Yugoslav, and Italian broadcasts, in addition to those of Voice of America, the BBC and other worldwide stations. As a result, Albanians were well aware of the wave of political liberalization that swept through Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990. The violent end of the Ceaucescu regime in Romania in December 1989 had a particularly strong impact on Albania. Subsequent pressure for Albania to change was strengthened as well by the country's young population; a result of a high birth rate, the age of the average Albanian citizen is only 26 years, the lowest in Europe. Combined with poor economic conditions, this population was growing increasingly restless in its state of isolation.

On foreign policy matters, Albania originally viewed the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a Soviet-American conspiracy to divide Europe permanently, and therefore declined to participate during the formative stages of conference in the mid-1970's. In 1990, however, the Albanian Government changed its position, requesting and obtaining observer status at the Copenhagen Human Dimension Meeting in June of that year. Albania has enjoyed the same status at all subsequent CSCE meetings since and would now like to become a full member. The prime motivation for joining the CSCE is to gain acceptance in an increasingly integrated Europe and to obtain all the economic benefits which that would eventually entail.

In addition, Albania sought to establish relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union, maintaining officially that the ending of the Cold War had brought an end as well to a need for vigilance against becoming a pawn of the superpowers. Relations with the Soviets, broken during the Sino-Soviet split in 1961, were restored in August 1990, while relations with the United States, broken in 1939 as Italy took effective control of the country, were only restored in March 1991 (attempts to reestablish relations immediately after World War II were unsuccessful). In August 1990, however, the Albanian Government received a congressional delegation from the U.S. Helsinki Commission. In addition, while President Alia's visit to the United States in September 1990 was for the purpose of attending the United Nations General Assembly rather than holding bilateral talks, his visit signalled a strong desire to improve U.S.-Albanian ties, including with the Albanian-American community.

On the domestic front there were important signs of change as well. In January 1990 and on many occasions since, there were reports of large demonstrations for reform in several Albanian cities and towns, which, in some cases, the Albanian authorities are believed to have brutally repressed and subsequently denied ever taking place. Several reforms were announced, however, which included the abolition of criminal penalties for religious propaganda, liberalization of passport issuance, establishment of a ministry of justice, and permission for individuals to sell produce privately and to form small family businesses. Critical to the subsequent opening of Albanian society, direct-dial telephone lines were established with over 50 countries in March 1990, permitting an unprecedented degree of contact and communication with the outside world.

In early July, apparently responding to the lack of implementation of the announced reforms, more than 5,000 Albanian citizens stormed the West German and other Embassies in Tirane seeking to leave the country. A number were known to have been shot by Albanian authorities while running toward the embassies, and the diplomatic district of the city was closed off. As world attention focused on the country and the situation in the embassies became increasingly difficult, however, the Albanians eventually made the decision to permit those in the embassies to leave for Italy, Czechoslovakia, France and elsewhere. Many sought to come to the United States, and some announced a hunger strike near the U.S. Embassy in Paris to protest delays in processing. The whole incident seemed to have strengthened the reform faction within the Albanian leadership, with several hard-liners being replaced by moderates.

Steps to bring Albania out of its relative isolation in world affairs and, concurrently, to loosen the tight grip of the state on Albanian society were welcomed at home and abroad. Months later, however, these initial steps had not kept pace with rising popular expectations and frustration over a rapidly deteriorating economy. Subsequent public demands for additional and more serious moves toward democracy were paralleled by statements from other countries that only such moves would enable Albania to gain its desired international standing, including membership in the CSCE process. Facing what appeared to be a growing political and economic crisis, the Government of Albania accelerated a process of reform in late 1990 and early 1991.

The first major response of the Albanian Government to the increased pressure for change came in October, when a draft election law was announced that would be adopted the following month. The law would, for the first time since World War II, permit multiple candidates, all of whom still had to be endorsed by the Labor (Communist) Party or its front organizations, to contest each of the Albanian parliament's 250 seats, as well as establish voting procedures that would respect the secrecy of the ballot. In addition, Albania played host to a meeting of foreign ministers from Balkan countries on October 24-25, during which scores of foreign journalists covering the event were permitted to enter the country for the first time.

These measures, unprecedented by Albanian standards, nevertheless represented a continuation of the moderate, cautious approach to political liberalization by which President Ramiz Alia and the Communist leadership hoped to retain their power. The new election law, for example, allowed for increased pluralism in the People's Assembly but not for alternative political parties. And during the course of the Balkan ministerial Albania's secret police, the *Sigurimi*, as well as military forces were reportedly deployed in significantly greater numbers than usual.

The continuing limits to reform efforts were highlighted by criticism of Albania's human rights record by Yugoslavia and Greece at the Balkan foreign ministers meeting, as well as by the defection, announced in Paris on the second day of the ministerial, of Albania's most well-known writer and most visible proponent of reform, Ismail Kadare. In a letter to President Alia explaining his decision to defect, Kadare said that he had earlier "expressed very clearly the demand for urgent, deep and complete democratization of the country. However, the promises given were not kept and I along with many Albanians remained disillusioned and bitter."

Kadare's defection was seen as a major blow to Alia, especially since it occurred as the Albanian Government was attempting to convince the 34 CSCE participating States to grant Albania full membership in the process for the November CSCE summit meeting in Paris. Albania had been given observer status at each of the CSCE meetings held since June 1990, but the Government's handling of the July storming of the foreign embassy compounds in Tirane by thousands of Albanians wanting to leave the country, along with its poor human rights record generally, generated a feeling that full CSCE membership was premature. This was also the position taken by then Helsinki Commission Chairman DeConcini, U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), and U.S. Representative Jim Moody (D-WI), who concluded after visiting Albania in August 1990 that "as a full CSCE member, Albania would be glaringly out of step with the rapidly developing process of democratization, political pluralism, the rule of law and free market economies that is taking place throughout Europe."

More visible pressures for further change came to the fore soon thereafter. In early December, students at the Enver Hoxha University of Tirane, objecting to power failures which left dormitories without heat or light, boycotted classes and demanded that President Alia meet with them to hear their complaints firsthand. Their protest turned into a 3-day demonstration, at which thousands of people called for democracy and shouted anti-communist slogans. The demonstration was reported to have been dispersed violently by special security police. Rioting subsequently erupted in several cities, with destructive rampages prompting the deployment of combat troops and the arrest of scores of individuals who were subsequently charged with vandalism.

Alia did meet with the university students, however, and an emergency plenum of the Central Committee of the Labor Party was quickly convened. At the meeting, five full members and two candidate members of the Politburo, most of whom were considered hard-liners, were dismissed. The Central Committee in effect announced the end of the one-party state in Albania when it decided on December 11 "that the creation of independent political organizations, in accordance with the laws of force, is to the good of the further democratization of the life of the country and pluralism." Several intellectuals, including cardiologist Sali Berisha and economics professor Gramoz Pashko, moved quickly to take advantage of the new situation, forming the first opposition political party -- the Democratic Party -- the day after the decision was made.

This dramatic change in the party position came as a surprise, since Alia and other officials had, up to that time, held firm on tolerating only multiple candidates, not multiple parties, in the elections on February 10. Subsequent weeks saw attention focus on bringing announced policy changes into practice. The Democratic Party, viewing February elections as too soon for the opposition to mount a serious campaign, called for postponing elections until May and for revising the election law. These requests were at first rejected by the People's Assembly. The Democratic Party, after holding several mass rallies and establishing its own newspaper, responded by threatening to boycott the February elections. The Government then sought to pacify the opposition by releasing hundreds of political prisoners. After a miners' strike supported the demand for postponement, however, the Government rescheduled the elections for March 31.

Meanwhile, other parties, including an Ecological, an Agrarian, a Greek minority and a Republican Party, began to form. The official trade union declared its independence from the Labor Party and said that it would fight to improve working conditions. Statues of Stalin were removed from downtown Tirane and throughout Albania. Nexhmije Hoxha was replaced as head of the Democratic Front, an organization which serves as a transmission belt for the Communist Party in directing Albanian society. Religious services, including a Christmas Mass attended by several hundred people, were being held for the first time in decades. The first independent human rights group, the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was organized.

On December 26, the Labor Party held a national Party Conference which went into closed session to debate how far-reaching the reforms could go. Finally, on December 31, Albanian newspapers published a new, draft constitution for the country which differs with the current constitution in that the Labor Party is not named and a separation between the state and "political organizations" is created. Various human rights were also enshrined in the draft as well as guarantees for foreign investment, although "the principles of socialism" would continue to guide education.

The new year saw pressure for reform continue, however, including a second and third refugee crisis for Albania. With border guards no longer shooting those crossing the frontier, more than 6,000 Albanian citizens reportedly streamed over snowy mountain passes and into neighboring Greece during the closing days of 1990 and the first days of 1991. While most were believed to be members of Albania's Greek minority, some were known to be of the Catholic and Muslim faith, and 37 members of the small Jewish community were permitted to fly to Rome en route to Israel. The large number of refugees pouring into Greece caused considerable concern to the Greek Government, which called upon Albanians to remain in Albania. It asked for and received assurances from the Albanian Government that individuals who return to Albania would not be punished. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agreed to assess the situation, and the European Community agreed to grant aid for the refugees. In addition, Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis held talks with Albanian officials in Tirane on January 13-14.

In March, with widespread rumors circulating that visas to Italy were available upon request, Albanian citizens travelled to Durres and other coastal cities seeking passage across the Adriatic. Rioting ensued when the rumors were found to be false, and close to 20,000 Albanians nevertheless departed on boats they had commandeered. Their destination was usually Brindisi in southern Italy on the opposite shore of the Strait of Otranto. The situation grew so bad that military rule was established in several Albanian ports. Italy, caught by surprise by the mass exodus to its shores, was unable to cope with the situation and finally decided to send some refugees back to Albania. As the situation worsened, Yugoslavia stated its willingness to receive all Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins living in Albania.

Meanwhile, popular protest within Albania continued, including against the founding father of Communist Albania, Enver Hoxha. Statues of the former leader were attacked and had to be protected, although the protesters were successfully able to remove the large, golden statue of the former leader from Skenderbeg square in the center of Tirane. Ramiz Alia dismissed the entire government and installed a provisional government, and he agreed to release all remaining political prisoners in light of the protests. It became clear by the harsh reaction to some demonstrations, however, that the President would seek to preserve the legitimacy of the Communist Party that was the basis for his own power.

As election day approached, the situation remained tense. The newly formed opposition parties, however, remained committed to participating in the upcoming elections despite the limited extent to which they believed they would be free and fair. These parties seemed to view change in Albania as a necessarily gradual process, and hoped to encourage the public to remain in Albania and provide the pressure needed to keep up the momentum for the reform process. A positive effect of this pressure was the release of 277 political prisoners two days before the elections, leaving few political cases unresolved.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Contested Seats

Contested in the March 31 elections were the 250 seats of the unicameral People's Assembly. Based on a majority as opposed to a proportional election process, each of the 250 electoral zones for which there was one seat had to be contested by at least two and, in practice, usually three or more candidates.

One opposition party -- the Republican Party -- called for changing the elections from a majority system, which was felt to give the most advantage to the ruling party, to a proportional system, in which it thought it could more ably compete. The authorities responded that this was not possible, since the People's Assembly, having approved the election law, had recessed with no mandate to reconvene.

Runoff elections -- for those races in which no candidate received a majority but at least two received at least 25 percent of the votes each -- were scheduled for one week later, i.e., Sunday, April 7. If more than two candidates received 25 percent of the vote each, only the highest two would compete in the runoff. A second-round -- for those seats in which two candidates did not receive 25 percent of the votes each, requiring a new list of candidates -- was scheduled for one week after that, i.e., Sunday, April 14. In the latter case, if one candidate did receive 25 percent of the vote, that name would be maintained for the new round. Theoretically, runoffs for the second round might be necessary and even third-round elections, depending on the outcome of the voting.

There were no popular elections for the head of state -- the President of the Presidium of the People's Assembly -- as is the case in many other countries. Instead, the President is to be selected by the new Assembly, which will also choose the new head of government, or prime minister. Before choosing the President, who may or may not be a delegate, the Assembly will have to adopt a new constitution which will establish a new political system based on the new, pluralistic conditions in the country. Local elections in Albania are, at present, one year away, although the new Assembly may decide to reschedule them for an earlier date.

The Players

Only a short period of time transpired between the tolerance of political parties other than the ruling Communist Party, known as the Party of Labor, and the holding of multi-party elections. Only a small number of parties were therefore able to form. However, for the first multi-party election in a small country with a relatively homogeneous population, the likelihood that a plethora of parties would have formed during the course of a longer campaign period was rather small. Generally, the major parties had broad programs and differed primarily in their ideological outlook. Some, however, geared their concerns toward particular constituencies or concerns, such as women, youth, or the environment, and, in one case, an ethnic minority.

In total, there were six recognized political parties at the time of the elections. In addition, five political organizations were able to field candidates. These 11 groups could be divided into three groups:

-- the Party of Labor, the ruling, Communist Party of Albania;

-- the front organizations, specifically the Democratic Front, Union of Women, the Union of Youth, the Professionai Trade Unions and the Committee of Veterans, which, before political pluralism was introduced, served as ideological transmission belts from the Party of Labor to selected segments of the population; and

-- the opposition -- or alternative -- parties, consisting of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Agrarian Party, the Ecological Party, and *Omonia*, a party representing the interests of Albania's ethnic Greek minority.

The Party of Labor

With roots going back to 1929, the Party of Labor *(Partia e Punes)* was the name given in 1948 to the Communist Party of Albania which was founded in November 1941 to resist the control of the fascist government installed by Italy in 1939. Enver Hoxha, a Tosk from the town of Gjirokaster, was leader of the party from the time of its founding until his death in April 1985. He was succeeded as First Secretary of the Party by Ramiz Alia, a Gheg from the northern town of Shkoder, who still holds that position. The party's strength has historically been located in the southern, Tosk regions of the country.

The Party of Labor was, until the opposition was legalized in December 1990, the only political party permitted in post-World War II Albania. Indeed, its bureaucracy has been the real political power in Albania for the last 45 years, exercising total control of the governmental structure from national to local levels and keeping the population under its control through the various front organizations, especially the Democratic Front. The Party of Labor, therefore, had enormous financial, human and other resources at its disposal as a participant in the elections. By the mid-1980's, the Party of Labor had a total membership of about 125,000 people.

While there had been earlier Party purges, Enver Hoxha's tight reign on Party affairs kept the Party of Labor and Albania's political system, as a whole, firmly on its Stalinist course. Following Hoxha's death in 1985, however, rivalries within the Party slowly emerged, with Hoxha's hand-picked successor, Ramiz Alia, believed to be leading a reform faction vis-a-vis still powerful hard-liners. As the Party of Labor was dislodged from its entrenched position in Albanian society during 1990 and into 1991, further personnel changes seemed to indicate that the reformers were winning the internal struggle. Alia, owing his own position and legitimacy to Hoxha and the Party, was careful not to break completely from its legacy despite its brutal nature; however, by the time of the elections Alia seemed on the brink of dropping the Party apparatus as the source of his future political ambitions.

On the eve of the elections, the Party of Labor had the burden of being the party responsible for the repression of the past and the economic crisis of the present. Despite its gradual movement toward political liberalization, this was viewed as a relatively recent development, one caused primarily by popular pressure rather than a real rethinking of the Party's ideological tenets. On the other hand, having ruled for so long, the Party had the advantage of representing the status quo and security, especially in the countryside. While there is popular dissatisfaction with the current situation, there was a general belief, held even among opposition party leaders, that the peasantry might be reluctant to risk what little they had for the changes advocated by alternative parties. In fact, a new Party program stressed commitments to provide for public welfare and service. This hesitancy, moreover, would be reenforced by a fear of opposing the party in power, given its reputation for punishing opposition forces.

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The Party of Labor fielded a total of 243 candidates, apparently deciding not to run directly against popular leaders of its strongest rival, the opposition Democratic Party, in seven electoral zones.

The Front Organizations

As is common in almost every Communist-ruled country, the Communist Party had, under its control and direction, front organizations which would transmit party positions and directives to the population. Trade unions and youth organizations were normally the most visible of these organizations. In Albania, the Democratic Front *(Fronti Demokratik)* and several smaller front organizations served this purpose.

In late 1990, the official trade union broke from the Party of Labor, declaring itself an independent political organization. Other front groups soon followed suit. Meanwhile, Nexhmije Hoxha was replaced as the head of the Democratic Front in December 1990, causing a further decline in the coordination of front organization activities.

For the elections, four front organizations, along with the Democratic Front itself, supported almost 400 candidates in the elections, fielding more than 40 of them jointly either with the Party of Labor or with each other. The Democratic Front and the Professional Trade Union *(Bashkimet Profesionale)* supported over 100 candidates each, the Union of Youth *(Bashkimi i Rinise)* approximately 90 candidates, the Union of Women *(Bashkimi i Grave)* about 70, and the Committee of Veterans *(Komiteti i Veteraneve)* seven candidates.

Like the Party of Labor, the front organizations had countrywide bases and considerable resources. For the most part, however, their involvement was relatively minor despite the number of candidates they fielded. As offshoots of the Party of Labor, they were unlikely to generate support among those who opposed the current regime and who suffered under its rule. On the other hand, those willing to support the regime would likely cast their vote for its best representative, the Party of Labor, and not for its fronts. With the population largely polarized between these two camps, only in zones where specific candidates were either popular personally or endorsed by the Party of Labor as well could the front organization hope to demonstrate a good showing on election day.

The Opposition Parties

In the brief period during which alternative political parties were permitted in Albania, five such parties were formed to run in the elections. Others parties were reported to have formed but either were not able to meet the requirements for registration or decided to fold into larger and already registered parties. A human rights group, the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was formed under the same law as the alternative parties but remained an independent organization, not a political party that participated in the elections.

By far the most prominent of the new political parties is the Democratic Party (*Partia Demokratike*), founded on December 12, 1990, one day after the decision of the Party of Labor Central Committee to permit alternative, independent organizations to form. Its principal leaders are cardiologist Sali Berisha, Chairman, economics professor Gramoz Pashko, student activist Azem Hajdari and political activist Genc Pollo.

The main aims of the Democratic Party program include such democratic elements as respect for human rights, establishment of a judicial system based on the rule of law and the introduction of free market forces into the ailing Albanian economy. On the former two points, other major parties held similar positions but were not believed to have been as seriously committed to them as the Democratic Party. On the latter, the Democratic Party was certainly viewed as the strongest advocate of major economic reform. Despite the disastrous economic condition of Albania, however, there was some hesitancy about the "shock therapy" economic program of the Democratic Party, formulated by economist Gramoz Pashko. While there was general agreement on the need for reform, many Albanian citizens, particularly in the countryside, were thought to be wary of risking what little they were able to get from the current, command and collective economic system in the hope of getting more from a rapidly developing private, market-oriented system.

By the time of the elections, the Democratic Party claimed a membership larger than that of the ruling Party of Labor. Moreover, it was the only political party that fielded candidates in each of the 250 electoral zones. Despite a leadership comprised of intellectuals who, to varying degrees, were successful within the confines of the existing political system, the strong reform positions of the Democratic Party and the public appeal of Dr. Berisha as its chairman encouraged a wide range of the Albanian population to join its ranks. Its popularity as the first and main channel for the popular expression of criticism of the current regime and even of the Communist system as a whole created a feeling of considerable confidence about the chances for a Democratic Party victory. Indeed, upon travelling down the streets of Tirane and throughout Albania, observers would note the "V" sign repeatedly made by the fingers of passers-by. In addition, the party was able to organize large outdoor rallies, including one to end the campaign two days before the elections. The Democratic Party established its own newspaper, *Rilindja Demokratike* (Democratic Awakening), which was published in the first week of January and has continued with a semi-weekly print of 60,000 copies.

The second main opposition party was the Republican Party (*Partia Republikane*), founded in January 1991 and led by Sabri Godo. Like the Democratic Party, the Republican Party has a broad platform and support from across the country. Also, it has protection of human rights and the building of democracy in Albania as key elements in its platform. In fact, the party drew its inspiration for democracy from the 1920's, the only democratic period in Albania's history. Where it differs most from the Democratic Party is in its economic goals, which are much less radical and stressed socio-economic rights over the development of private enterprise, although these are not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive. Within the Albanian political spectrum, the Republican Party is seen as somewhere between the Party of Labor and the Democratic Party.

The Republican Party, while smaller than the Labor or Democratic Parties, nevertheless fielded a respectable number of candidates -- about 160 -- throughout the country. It also was able to have its own semi-weekly newspaper, *Republika* (the Republic), the first edition of which was published on February 10.

Three other independent, alternative political parties participated in the elections. They were smaller than the Democratic and Republican Parties as well as the Party of Labor and the front organizations. They also had programs which gave support to broad principles for the country but focused concern on specific issues or concerns. Similarly, their support was not countrywide but regional, and they fielded a high percentage of candidates in the electoral zones of only a few administrative districts. An Agrarian, or Peasants', Party (*Partia Agrare*) focusing on rural issues, for example, fielded more than 30 candidates, primarily in the districts of Fier, Lushnje and Tepelene. *Omonia*, an organization created to represent the interests of Albania's Greek minority, fielded five candidates, two in the Gjirokaster district and three in the Sarande district in the southern part of the country. Finally, an Ecology Party (*Partia Ekologjike*), which claimed to have formed as an independent environmental group in late November 1990, fielded one candidate in Tirane District and one candidate in Vlore District.

Boycotts

There were serious doubts from the very moment multi-party elections were announced about the extent to which they would be free and fair, especially given the history of repression in Albania and obvious reluctance of the Party of Labor to surrender its monopoly on political power. Nevertheless, the opposition parties in the end decided not to boycott the elections. Instead, they decided that democracy in Albania would be best served through their participation, despite obstacles which they thought they could nevertheless overcome.

Early in 1991, however, the Democratic Party and other opposition forces threatened to consider a boycott if some of their proposals to put the emerging political parties on a more even playing field were not met. Most important of these proposals was a call for postponing the elections, set for February 10, until May. The reason for this proposal was that the time left between the forming of alternative parties and the elections was so obviously short that no serious campaign could be mounted. The Government at first rejected any postponement but, when striking miners joined in the call, on January 16, 1991, the authorities agreed to reschedule the elections for March 31. While not as great a delay as it had sought, the opposition nevertheless claimed it a victory and agreed to participate in the elections, especially since the authorities agreed as well to provide new parties with some funding and office space. An opposition proposal to redraft the election law, which was adopted prior to the decision to allow alternative parties to form, was never accepted, but this fact did not seem to bring the participation of the opposition in the elections into question. A subsequent opposition boycott threat, however, did make the Government agree in early February that the military, police and courts would be depoliticized -- i.e., moved out of the direct control of the Party of Labor -- although it was reported that this would be done only after the elections.

THE ELECTION LAW AND CAMPAIGNING

Movement toward multi-party elections began only in the latter part of 1990 and developed a quick momentum of its own. As recently as the Helsinki Commission's visit to Albania in August 1990, the possibility of permitting opposition parties to exist was out of consideration. At that time, the official line, from which there was no visible diversion, was that there was sufficient pluralism within the Party of Labor and that permitting other parties to exist would divide the country.

Continuing pressure for reform in subsequent months, however, led to the enactment of a new election law -- No. 7423 -- which replaced the 1966 law on elections to the People's Assembly. The new law, brought into force on November 13, 1990, provides for secret ballots and multiple candidates for Assembly seats, although the law stipulates that the candidates had to have the endorsement of the Party of Labor or its front organizations. On December 1, a decree of the Presidium of the People's Assembly, which acts in the Assembly's name between sessions, defined 250 zones for Assembly seats.

Following three days of student protests in Tirane in mid-December, the Central Committee of the Party of Labor approved on December 11, as did the Albanian Government the next day, a decision to permit the formation of independent political organizations which would, among other things, be allowed to field candidates in the elections. A decree to that affect was adopted by the Presidium on December 18, although the election was still to be held in accordance with the earlier election law. A subsequent decree increased the size of the Central Election Commission and subordinate bodies at the local and regional levels to allow for the membership of representatives of the new political parties, and permitted Albanian citizens abroad to vote.

The Election Infrastructure

The election infrastructure in Albania has three tiers. At the top is the Central Election Commission, below which are zonal commissions for each of the 250 electoral zones. Under each zonal commission are committees at each polling station, the total number of which varies according to the zone's population and its distribution.

According to the electoral law, there were to be 13 members of the Central Election Commission, including a chairman, vice-chairman and secretary. The number was increased to a total of 16 members in light of the Presidium decree of January 17, 1991, which took into account the establishment of alternative political parties which were to be represented on the commission. Either the vice-chairman or the secretary of the commission had to be a jurist. The members of the commission were approved by the People's Assembly. Selected as the Chairman of the Central Election Commission was Rexhep Mejdani, a physicist who was also a candidate of the Trade Unions for an Assembly seat in Tirane. Although not formally listed as members of the Party of Labor, there were complaints that as many as 13 of the 16 members of the Central Election Commission were considered "Communist," the remainder being members of the Democratic, Republican and Ecological Parties.

According to the election law, the responsibilities of the Central Commission included: supervising implementation of the election law throughout the country; maintaining a register of candidates; considering complaints of irregularities by zonal commissions; and delivering the results of the elections to the Commission on Mandates of the People's Assembly.

The 250 zonal commissions originally had five members, including a chairman and a secretary. The decree changing the size of the Central Commission similarly expanded the zonal commissions to seven, who all had to be approved by the executive committee of the district in which they are located. No member could run for the seat of the zone in which they served, and the chairman or the secretary had to be a jurist. The zonal commissions were to: supervise the implementation of the election law in their zone; register and announce candidates; tally the numbers of the votes for candidates provided by the polling committees; declare the results of the election in their zone; consider complaints of irregularities at polling stations; issue a certificate to the winning candidate confirming his or her election; and send the election record to the Central Commission.

The polling committees were originally supposed to have three members, including a chairman and secretary, but the January 17 decree increased their size to five. There was no requirement for any members to be jurists, but, like zonal commission members, they were prohibited from running for office in the same zone as the committee on which they served. The membership of polling committees was approved by the local executive committee. For the most part, the chairman of the polling committee was a declared independent, and members of opposition parties were on every polling committee observed, although not always present. The functions of the polling committee was to: implement the elections at their respective polling stations; count the ballots; register all complaints and criticisms made by voters or candidates; pass the record of the results to the zonal commission; and send the ballots to the local executive committee for their archives.

Districts

For the purposes of the elections, 250 electoral zones were established within the borders of the already existing 26 administrative districts which comprise Albania, ranging from three zones in Tropoje District to 29 zones in Tirane District. The election law stipulates that the electoral zones had to have an approximately equal number of residents, which, Commission observers were told, averaged around 12,000-13,000 inhabitants per zone of which usually 7,000-8,000 were eligible voters.

A complaint made by representatives of the Democratic Party after the election claimed that there was a wide discrepancy between the population of electoral zones, with two or three times the number of voters residing in some urban electoral zones than in rural zones. While this cannot be rejected, since population figures for each zone were not available, the zones were, in fact, established prior to the agreement to permit the formation of alternative political parties, and any inequality in representation would not seem to have been directed at giving the ruling party an advantage over opposition parties.

A related and more evident concern was the depopulation of some districts due to massive emigration from the country. The Democratic Party, early in the campaign, complained that the authorities were encouraging those segments of the population most likely to vote for opposition parties to leave Albania and seek refugee status in Greece or Italy. The Albanian Government denied these allegations, but the departure of thousands of disgruntled citizens, whether encouraged or simply tolerated by the authorities, most likely meant fewer people who would have voted against the Communists with the ballot if they had not already done so with their feet.

There were 5,450 polling stations scattered among the 250 electoral zones, averaging about 22 polling stations per zone. Within each zone, at least one polling station had to be set up for every 600 voters. In practice, most of the polling stations observed had between 200 and 300 voters on their voter registration lists. Due probably to limits on travel in a still very rural country where private automobiles have only recently been permitted, the election law provided for a polling station to be set up near a "work center" if it is more than three kilometers from the closest polling station and if there are at least 50 eligible voters in the designated area.

Separate polling stations were set up in military installations with a minimum of 20 voters, with a second for those with more than 600 voters, the votes from which would be included in the votes for the zone in which the station was located. Polling stations were established in Albanian Embassies and diplomatic missions abroad with at least five eligible voters, although their votes would be tallied within one of the 29 zones of Tirane. Polling stations were established on ships with at least five eligible voters, whose votes would be counted in the zone where the ship was registered. Finally, polling stations were permitted in hospitals or wards of hospitals or other similar institutions with at least 15 eligible voters, whose votes would be included with those of the zone in which the hospital or institution was located.

There was considerable concern about the possibility for manipulating election results in the polling stations located at military installations, on ships or at diplomatic missions abroad, since they were likely to have, as voters, supporters of the Party of Labor and were more difficult than regular polling stations for election observers to visit on election day. Personnel, for example, could be added to particular military installations to help a particular candidate, and the votes from diplomatic missions went to zones in Tirane, where government leaders were running, and not in the zone of prior residence. On election day, foreign observers were able to visit a polling station at the military academy in central Tirane, but access to ships and diplomatic missions was obviously impossible. There were some reports of increasing the number of soldiers in one or another electoral zone, although where this took place it is not clear that it indeed succeeded in altering any of the final results.

Candidates

The first step in the election process was the proposal of candidates, of which there had to be at least two per election race. To be eligible for listing on the ballot, the potential candidate had to be a citizen permanently residing on Albanian territory, although, similar to the electoral practices of one-party communist states, he or she did not have to reside in the zone for which they were running. The only limitation in this regard was that a person could be a candidate for only one seat.

There were three ways in which one could be a candidate. One was to be nominated by a registered political party. A second method was to run in one electoral zone as an independent candidate, in which case the signatures of 300 voters from that zone were needed in order to be listed on the ballot. The third method was to run as a write-in candidate, since, unlike many elections in Europe, in Albania the name of a person not listed on the ballot could be written-in by the voter. As a practical matter, the latter option was only a theoretical possibility; in practice, there were no known write-in candidates for the March 31 elections. Nominations of candidates, noting their first, last and father's name as well as age and a declaration from the candidate accepting the nomination, had to be registered with the election commission 15 days before election day, in other words by March 16, 1991.

A person did not have to be a resident in the zone for which he or she was nominated, a practice typical of nominations in one-party, communist countries. Many nevertheless would run in the zones of residence, where they were most known, although President Alia ran in the Tirane district in which he and previous Labor Party First Secretaries always ran. Other senior government officials also ran in Tirane districts.

In total, 1,074 candidates were listed for the 250 seats of the People's Assembly on March 31. On average, therefore, there were about four candidates for each seat, with some races including only two or as many as seven candidates.

As mentioned earlier, the seats for the Assembly were to be decided by the majority, as opposed to the proportional, system of elections. In other words, the voters would vote for a particular candidate and not for a political party, although party affiliations accompanied the names on the ballots. To win the seat, a candidate had to obtain a majority of the total votes cast, which had to represent at least 50 percent of the number of registered voters in that zone. If no candidate received a majority, the top two candidates would be listed on the ballot for a runoff election one week later, or on April 7, provided that both candidates received at least 25 percent of the vote. If two candidates did not receive at least 25 percent of the vote each, then a second round would be held two weeks later, or on April 14, with a new list of candidates on the ballot.

In one electoral zone in Pogradec, with three listed candidates, both the Democratic and Republican Party candidates withdrew from the race after one of them was physically attacked, leaving only the Party of Labor candidate and forcing a second-round election which was held on April 7.

Campaigning, Funding, Media Access

One of the greatest problems regarding the March 31 Albanian elections was in regard to campaigning and access to the media, given the considerable controls that existed on independent, public activity and the press, television and radio in Albania up to the time of the elections.

The election law was rather specific and restrictive on campaign activities. First, it required that party programs must be made public and could not contain "ideas which are fascist, racist or terrorist or ideas inspired by or borrowed from the traitorous organizations created during the National Liberation War." Such restrictions, and particularly the last one, could be used to ban parties on the basis of their views. Furthermore, candidates were prohibited from "using the means of information of foreign countries for propaganda" in the campaign, which could have been but fortunately was not used against the various candidates that were often and extensively interviewed by Voice of America and other foreign media and are broadcast back to Albania, where they are a major source of information.

On the other hand, certain principles and safeguards were provided by the law, such as prohibiting state organs and administration from promoting candidates, the provision of financial assistance for the campaign to those candidates who do not have sufficient funds, and a prohibition on the buying of votes or the spreading of false information about other candidates. The main concern here was less on the law than on its application.

Rallies and other public gatherings associated with the campaign were, in theory, subject to Decree 7408 on "Assemblies, Gatherings and Manifestations of Citizens in Public Places," adopted on July 31, 1990, by the Presidium of the People's Assembly. This decree, while signalling the expansion of opportunities for public gatherings, still placed limits on the right to freedom of assembly which could be easily abused in practice. For example, organizers of assemblies must inform the local police, normally 3 days in advance, of the aim, number of participants, date, time and place of the event, slogans to be launched or the posters to be carried, and the identities of the organizers or speakers. Failure to do so in punishable by a 1,000 lek (the Albanian currency) fine, equivalent to the average Albanian wage for one and one-half months, "with re-education through work, or loss of freedom for a period of up to one year." Assemblies can be prohibited if they "a) aim at overthrowing the state and social order; b) violate public order; c) encourage penal acts or other law violations; d) offend or insult the national feeling; or e) could damage relations with other states." Also prohibited are assemblies "in which rebellious calls which affect the prestige and authority of the State are launched, . . . or in which posters, emblems or other symbols and figurative means with an anti-popular, fascist or racist content which stir up national hatred are used."

In practice, this decree was applied inconsistently in late 1990 and into the 1991 campaign period. In many cases, such as most student protests and political party rallies, no action was taken against the public assemblies, even if they were spontaneous gatherings to criticize government policies and criticisms. Instead, President Alia and other senior officials would seek to meet with the demonstration leaders and, if possible, address their concerns. Indeed, it was because of student protests that Alia decided to permit multi-party elections to take place and, later, to form a new, provisional government; opposition party demands as well as striking miners convinced Alia to agree to postpone the elections from February to March.

On the other hand, demonstrations outside of Tirane were often broken up by force, although in some cases this happened after the demonstrations became violent and destructive of property. Many demonstrations were broken up, however, even when they remained peaceful, and hundreds of individuals were detained and even imprisoned with a 10-year sentence for their involvement in demonstrations. Even in Tirane in February 1991, when student and other public protests sought to remove the name of Enver Hoxha from the title of the university and a statue of the former leader from the main square, troops were mobilized, although their efforts to disperse the crowds threatened but did not include outright violence. It seemed as if the ruling party was drawing the line on permissible public protest to protect the symbols designed to give legitimacy to the Party of Labor, of which Enver Hoxha is the most prominent. Later, large, pro-communist "Enverist" rallies were organized to counter the anti-Hoxha gatherings.

This record on tolerance of public assembly likely acted to intimidate but not to deter the political parties in holding rallies, although, for the most part, party rallies were tolerated throughout the country. Most were held by the Democratic Party, which first received permission to hold a public rally in late December 1990 and subsequently drew crowds of tens of thousands in many Albanian cities. The authorities would not grant permission for the Democratic Party to hold a rally in Skenderbeg Square in the center of Tirane on March 29 -- two days before the elections -- but, when the Democratic Party decided to move the location to university grounds on the outskirts of the city, the rally, attended by tens of thousands of people, took place without any interference. Other types of gatherings, such as candidate meetings with constituents, were held without difficulty.

The election law was liberal in regard to the timing of campaign activities such as rallies, only prohibiting their occurrence on election day. An informal agreement was reached, however, in which the contending parties held no rallies and ceased campaigning on the day before the elections.

Official control of the media, which was manipulated to the advantage of the Party of Labor, was a major problem during the campaign period and subtracted considerably from the chances that Albania's first multi-party elections since the 1920's could ever be considered free and fair. The election law stipulates that every organization, association and individual "has equal rights to conduct propaganda in favor of the candidates nominated, in meetings, in the press, on the radio and television and in other ways." While this may have been followed in a formal sense by the official Albanian media, in practice heavy emphasis was given to promoting the Party of Labor and its candidates. This included the portrayal of foreign visitors and observers of the elections as supportive of Ramiz Alia and his rule.

Each party was limited to a 1-hour period and a second 45-minute period on television and radio to present their program, and the leaders of the each of the parties were given time for a brief statement the evening of Friday, March 29, when the campaign period ended with an informal agreement not to campaign the day before the election. While this applied equally to the Party of Labor as to the front organizations and opposition parties, regular news coverage continually gave heavy emphasis to rallies and other activities of the Party of Labor, prompting the Democratic Party to lodge a formal complaint in early January 1991.

As a result, television and radio did give greater coverage to opposition activities, although the problem was never fully corrected and the reports continued to be heavily edited either to minimize the indication of support for the opposition -- perhaps by understating attendance at a rally -- or to remove the more stinging criticisms of the ruling party, its leaders and its past. While speeches by President Alia and other top leaders were replayed at length on television programs, news reports of speeches by Sali Berisha and other opposition leaders normally consisted of film footage with a reporter summarizing what had happened rather than a recording of the speaker. Representatives of the Party of Labor responded that, while Alia and Party candidates were getting more coverage, these people were, in fact, also the President and government leaders of the country, and so their activities consisted of more than campaigning for their Assembly seat.

The same problem applied to the print media, although, unlike the broadcast media, the two larger opposition parties were able to have, like the Party of Labor and the Democratic Front, their own newspapers. *Rilindja Demokratike*, published by the Democratic Party, and *Republika*, published by the Republican Party, each had semi-weekly runs of 50,000-60,000 which were usually sold out soon after they became available. In contrast, the Party of Labor paper, *Zeri i Popullit* (The Voice of the People), and the paper of the Democratic Front, *Bashkimi* (Unity), both are dailies with runs of 105,000 and 30,000 respectively. The circulation of *Rilindja Demokratike* and *Republika* may, however, be much higher than its press run, as copies are read by the purchaser and then given to other readers. At the same time, the Democratic and Republican Parties both complained of erratic delivery of their newspapers, since the regime controls the mail and distribution system in Albania. The Democratic Party stated that subscribers to *Rilindja Demokratike* outside Tirane, especially in the countryside, frequently did not receive their copies.

The printing of campaign posters posed problems for the opposition parties similar to those regarding their own newspapers. Only in the final days of the campaign did posters become at all evident, including in Tirane. With minimal resources, apparently the parties had decided to save their posters until the most critical time. The Republican Party, however, complained that it had put up posters earlier but that most of them had been ripped down. Party representatives indicated that they suspected not only supporters of the ruling party of doing this but supporters of other opposition parties as well.

In any event, by election day the Democratic Party had its posters prominently displayed in large quantities both in Tirane and other cities, as did the Republican Party in smaller numbers. The Party of Labor, in contrast, made no real attempt to display special posters, but already existing signs, including along roads and lighted ones on tops of major buildings, recited popular Communist slogans, such as "Long Live Comrade Ramiz Alia" in central Elbasan or a "People, Party, Enver" spelled out on the side of a hill along Lake Ohrid in such large letters that it was visible miles away.

To finance the campaigning, the election law provided that "the state gives necessary assistance to candidates and organizations without sufficient material means and financial income to engage in the election campaign. The sources of financing the election campaign are controlled by the state." The need for such a provision was great in Albania, since the degree of state control in Albania until recently was so encompassing that only through it could a newly emerging independent organization obtain office space, transportation, communications and other resources. The fact that the era of political pluralism developed so rapidly in the country made any drastic changes in this situation impossible. The only other source of major assistance was from ethnic Albanians and organizations abroad, but the candidates in the elections were prohibited by the election law "from accepting assistance, gifts or financial aid from states and from foreign physical or juridical persons. . ."

Overall, the political parties did not seem to have many complaints about what the state had provided. This included a total of one million leks to the Democratic, Republican, Agrarian and Ecological Parties, use of office space in local government buildings in Tirane and in districts where the parties were fielding candidates, as well as automobiles and other equipment. What was desired in the future, however, was a more open political and economic system that could allow for less party dependency on the state for their activities.

Although the election law prohibited the use of "the media of foreign countries for propaganda during the election campaign", the foreign press, radio and television played a key role in the election process. First, foreign radio broadcasts, such as that of Voice of America, have a wide listening audience in Albania, and their reporting on events in the country, as well as interviews with various party leaders, Albanian officials and prominent Albanians residing abroad, such as writer Ismail Kadare, all helped to fill in gaps in the news on the elections which the official Albanian media left out and for which the opposition press was unable fully to compensate.

Second, the unprecedented presence of United States, European and other media representatives in Albania, especially in the final stages of the election campaign, brought many Albanian citizens into much closer contact with the outside world, and the Albanian Government also became significantly more sensitive to foreign press reporting on Albania, which had increased markedly in 1990 and 1991, and its impact on world views of Albania than it had been in the past. Some 300 reporters from 18 countries descended upon Tirane to cover the event, breaking the record of about 60 reporters covering the Balkan Foreign Ministerial in October 1990. A press center was established, and high-level Albanian officials, including President Ramiz Alia, held press conferences during which they were subjected to tough questions from the free Western press.

Harassment, Intimidation, Complaints

Along with control of the media, harassment and intimidation were a key shortcoming of the March 31 elections. Given the long history or harsh repression in Communist Albania, the rapidity of change was probably unable to erase totally the fear of an individual to express his or her own, possibly dissenting point of view or to risk being revealed as voting against the ruling party, even if this fear was unfounded. Such fears were apparently much stronger in the countryside than in the city, where expressions of support for the opposition with the "V" sign were visible everywhere. Indeed, when compared to the situation only months beforehand when even the leaders of the subsequently founded opposition parties would, at most, express guarded criticism of only some aspects of communist rule but not its very basis, it was remarkable that Albanian society had opened up as much as it had by the time of the elections.

Much of the intimidation was based on this general fear, which led to the circulation of unsubstantiated rumors about such things as the ability of the regime to learn for whom a voter voted, despite promises of secrecy. There were also possibly more intentionally spread rumors, however, about some of the opposition leaders and their past association with the existing regime. Some rumors circulated in the north, around Shkoder, to the effect that the Democratic Party was a Christian party that would move the country away from the Islamic heritage shared by the majority of the population. Similarly, senior election officials acknowledged the existence of a general tension in Albanian society as it moved into the unchartered waters of political pluralism and the polarization that it might cause.

There were a number of specific complaints as well. For example, the Democratic Party complained of harassment of its candidates. During the evening of March 18, for example, the car of a Democratic candidate in Berat district was stoned. Four days later, on March 22, a Democratic Party candidate for a seat in the Pogradec district was reportedly "attacked, beaten and badly wounded by a group known as the 'Volunteers of Enver.'" He and his Republican Party rival later decided to withdraw from the contest in protest. On the same day, a Democratic Party candidate holding a meeting with voters was broken up by local Labor Party supporters. In the town of Permet, the party claimed that one candidate was interrupted while addressing a crowd by a group of people who threw stones at him and the district party chief.

The Democratic Party also complained that Party of Labor candidates, when being interviewed on television as government officials, violated the provision of the election law on the neutrality of the state in the elections when they attacked opposition parties, their candidates and programs.

THE BALLOTING AND RESULTS

Voting

According to the election law, all citizens of Albania who are 18 years of age on election day have the right to vote in the elections. The only exclusions, the law continues, are those persons denied by the court because they have committed a penal act, have been arrested or are serving prison sentences, have been declared mentally incompetent, or are excluded from the right to vote with the approval of the state attorney. Official figures recorded just under 1.98 million citizens as eligible to vote. As indicated earlier, citizens who were unable to vote in their locality because they were abroad or serving in the military or on a ship, were accommodated with additional, nearby polling stations so that they could exercise their right to vote.

Eligibility to vote on election day was, in fact, determined by being named on the registered list of voters at the polling station where one would vote. Each voter could only be listed at only one polling station. The registration lists were prepared by the local executive authorities. There was a requirement that the voters lists had to be made public no later than 25 days before the election so that those citizens who were not on the list but considered themselves eligible to vote could seek to correct the situation with local authorities. Such a remedy, in fact, was available on election day itself, as local executive offices were open on March 31 to handle problem cases. Registration lists were reported to have been made public 10 days late, and in some localities, especially around Durres, there were reports that after some time the voter registration lists were removed from public display, preventing people from easily checking to see if they were registered to vote.

There were fears that thousands of citizens who had recently fled to Greece, Yugoslavia or Italy might still be on the lists and that supporters of the regime might be brought in who would use the names of these people to vote. Such a blatant violation of election procedures was not evident on election day. At some polling stations, the names of some of the people on the lists who had not voted were believed to be among those who had left the country, but in Korce District, an area near the border with both Greece and Yugoslavia from where many people were known to have left, polling committees indicated extremely high turnouts of over 90 percent but claimed that their voter registration lists were updated after the exodus. There was no way to dispute this explanation, and members of the polling committees and observers from opposition parties lodged no complaints of abuse. On the other hand, representatives of the Republican Party, which reportedly had lists of people who left the country so that the registration lists could be checked, were not visibly present in Korce, although no subsequent complaints by the Republican Party were heard.

A more serious concern was possible abuse of the so-called "six percent" rule in the election law, which allowed an additional one-fifteenth of the number of voters registered at a polling station to vote if these additional people could present a voter registration slip from the polling station at which they were registered. This procedure was designed to address the problem of those who might have moved between the time of registration and election day, but it opened the possibility of intentionally shifting a certain number of voters to polling stations in zones where the election race was close or, so opposition parties assumed, where important candidates from the Party of Labor were threatened with defeat. There was no hard evidence that this provision of the law was, in fact, abused on election day, and opposition representatives speculated that in races where it might have been abused it failed to alter the final result.

The ballots were uniform throughout the country, with each polling station writing in the first name, last name, father's name and party affiliation for each candidate on all of the ballots received. The candidates were placed on the ballot according to the alphabetical order of their first names. The ballot would have two markings stamped on them, one by the Central Election Commission and the other by the polling station. Observers learned that as many as 35,000 ballots had been stolen from the Central Election Commission in March, about which opposition party representatives expressed concern, but election officials discarded concerns of the possibility of fraudulent voting because the ballots had not been stamped.

The polling stations were open for voting on March 31 from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The length of the voting day was worsened by the fact that the daylight savings time led the clocks to be advanced one hour the night before. In practice, however, the voting process was relatively simple, a reflection of the fact that there was only one seat -- for the unicameral Assembly -- contested in each zone. There were no direct elections for President, and local elections were scheduled for 1992. Upon presentation of his or her identity card, the voter's name would be checked on the registered list and they would be given one ballot. They were then required to go into what was called the "cubicle of secrecy" (*Dhoma e Fshetesise*) -- a voting booth -- where they were required to cross out the names of the candidates they did not want, leaving only the one candidate's name for whom they were voting. While this procedure may seem odd and somewhat cumbersome for the voter, it likely reflected the voting procedures under a communist system that did not expect the participation of alternative parties, which was the case in Albania when the election law was written.

Unlike many European elections but similar to the United States, the voters could "write-in" a candidate by placing their first, last and father's name on the ballot and crossing out all other candidates. After making their selection, voters then folded their ballots three times and placed them in the ballot box.

A smaller ballot box, called the "mobile box" (*Kutia Levizese*), was used for those voters who were invalids or ill at home and therefore could not come to the polling station to vote. At least two members of the polling committee had to travel together with the box to the homes where voters requested them, and, upon certifying that the person was indeed a registered voter, the two committee members were to turn their backs to the voter so that the secrecy of the ballot would be respected.

Commission observers noted that, for the most part, the voting process was both orderly and correct. The polling committee members were well versed in the instructions for voters and what they could and could not do. Moreover, detailed instructions were printed in newspapers and posters were put up describing voting procedures to the population. As a result, polling committee members reported that the voters had very few questions and were aware of what they were doing, even though it was the first time that most of them ever had a choice in an election. In some instances, voters were observed preparing to vote outside of the cubicle of secrecy but were instructed by the polling committee to go first into the cubicle. Some individuals came to polling stations who professed to be illiterate and were therefore assisted by accompanying family members. There were no long lines of people waiting to vote, nor where there any polling stations observed that had any significant problems with the registration lists.

In no instance did the Commission observers hear a complaint from opposition party representatives on polling committees about the proceedings. Given complaints about general intimidation, however, it is possible that committee members did not want to report any problems to foreign visitors in the presence of the full committee. At some polling stations, in fact, the observers sensed that something improper might have happened earlier, but all committee members -- ruling party, opposition party and independent members alike -- denied the existence of any problems.

Isolated problems were nevertheless observed or reported to the Commission observers by opposition party representatives who were also observing the elections and sometimes by the voters themselves. For example:

-- One Democratic Party observer complained that, when he arrived at a polling station in the village of Thane outside of Elbasan at 6:00 a.m., the Democratic Party polling committee member had not yet arrived (he had stayed some distance away and had to walk to the polling station) and there were four ballots already in the ballot box. The polling committee chairman explained, however, that the polling station had opened when the radio announced that it was 6:00 a.m., while the observer, who went by the time on his wristwatch, arrived a few minutes later. The four ballots were those of the guards who had watched the polling station overnight, and who voted immediately upon the opening of the station before the observer arrived. The committee chairman even gave the names of the guards, although when the registration list was examined, one of the four names was not marked as having voted.

-- A voter in the town of Cerrik, also near Elbasan, complained that the "mobile box" was being taken to homes of those unable to go to the polling station by a committee member from the Party of Labor and a member from the Democratic Front, which he considered to be virtually the same organization. The polling committee chairman responded that, formally, they represented two different organizations but that, in any event, the mobile box seen was from a neighboring polling station and not his own.

-- At a polling station in a poor area of the city of Korce, one woman, visibly upset, complained that she was being denied the right to vote. While she did have an identity card, she was not on the registration list. A polling committee member explained that they had visited the apartment in which she claimed to live as they updated their list but that nobody had answered, while another noted that she did not spend too much time at her home. It soon became evident that the polling committee -- and apparently most of the neighborhood -- simply did not approve of her private life. A Democratic Party observer soon stepped forward and confirmed that she did have a legitimate complaint, prompting the polling committee secretary to confess that an honest mistake might have been made but that the woman would have to get proof of residence from the local executive committee since she was not on the list and had no registration slip. She agreed to go, as did the polling committee secretary. The observers waited outside the office of the local committee until both individuals emerged with a local official, who explained that the problem had been corrected and that she would be allowed to vote.

-- At one polling station in Elbasan, the ballot box was not properly sealed.

These complaints, while important to those who raised them, seemed to be isolated events in specific localities that probably did not represent any larger attempt to manipulate the outcome. At the same time, each of these instances did raise the question of the extent to which polling committee members could be trusted without a continued observer presence, even if the complaint made did not seem completely valid.

The Commission observers heard of isolated incidents from other foreign observers as well, such as one case in which a Party of Labor observer was taking the names of people who had not voted, and another in which people were contacted and told to go and vote. This would be in keeping with the tradition in communist Albania of getting a complete 100 percent voter turn-out or very close to that. When opposition observers were asked about pressure to vote, however, none speculated that there would be any action taken against those who chose not to do so.

In another incident, according to another foreign observer, a picture of Ramiz Alia was hanging in front of one polling station in Elbasan, although it was later removed at the insistence of a Democratic Party observer.

During the runoff elections one week later, there were further reports of irregularities. For example, the Democratic Party alleged that a ballot box in Lezhe had been opened while the Democratic Party representative was absent, and that soldiers were able to vote more than once in the Tirane zone in which the current Prime Minister, Fatos Nano, was running for an Assembly seat.

The Counting

After the polls closed at 8:00 p.m., the polling committees immediately set out to count the ballots. As with the voting, the committees seemed to have a clear understanding of what they were supposed to do and how they were supposed to do it. Where observed, the counting of the ballots seemed both orderly and correct.

The rules for counting were designed to prevent fraud. Upon the closing of the polling stations, the committees were first supposed to count the number of unused ballots. Next, they were to open the "mobile box" and put the ballots which it contained into the regular ballot box, which would then be shaken to mix the ballots. The ballot box was then opened and the ballots were removed one-by-one and shown to each of the committee members who kept their own tabulations. At the polling station observed, a Party of Labor observer and the Commission observers were also shown each ballot.

If, according to each of the committee members, the total number of voters marked on the registration list as having voted is equal to the number of valid ballots for each candidate plus that of invalid ballots, and if the number of unused ballots is added and equals the total number of ballots given to the committee, the chairman and secretary of the committee would fill out and sign a record of the results. If any committee member questioned the procedures used, he or she had the right to place their objection on the back of the record, which would then be taken up by the zonal commission. There were no cases observed, however, where this happened. The record, with the final tally on it, would be sent to the zonal election commission, which would add the records together to determine the winner, and would then inform the winning candidate. The ballots, on the other hand, would be placed in archives by the local executive authorities.

Two questions arose during the counting process. The first was at the polling station itself, where disagreement arose on what was considered an invalid ballot. For example, the Commission observers noted that the polling committee had determined that the crossing out of all but one name made the vote valid. The parties could be crossed out too, but a ballot on which on the parties and not the names were crossed out would be declared invalid. This seemed in accordance with the rules, although the Commission observers learned later that another polling station followed an exactly opposite procedure. While the specific vote count probably differed as a result, in both cases the respective procedure was consistently applied, so even the wrong decision on procedure was not made with the intention of providing advantage to any candidate or party.

The second question involved the reporting of the polling station results to the zonal commission for tabulation. This part of the counting process is always the most difficult to observe and potentially the easiest in which to commit fraud, regardless of the country in which the elections are taking place. Nevertheless, the ruling and opposition parties had representatives on the zonal commissions as well, and none later raised any complaints about the way in which this part of the process was handled. In fact, one opposition party leader speculated that problems were more likely to take place at the polling stations than at higher levels.

Results

The results of the first round were reported 2 days after the elections. Voter turnout was an extremely high 98.9 percent. Of the 250 zones, 249 held elections, the remaining one being the Pogradec zone where two of the three candidates had withdrawn from the race. Of the 249 which held elections, 231 were decided, 17 required a runoff one week later, and one, along with the Pogradec zone, required a second round. The Pogradec zone, however, was able to have its second round on April 7, while the other, from Lushnje district, was scheduled for two weeks later, on April 14, because only one candidate received over 25 percent of the vote but none received over 50 percent.

Of the 231 decided on March 31, the Party of Labor won 162 seats, 21 of which represented joint candidates with the Democratic Front, the Union of Youth, the Professional Trade Unions and the Union of Women. In other words, Labor held 64.5 percent of the seats, just under the two-thirds majority necessary to pass constitutional changes in the Assembly without opposition assistance. The Democratic Party won 65 seats. *Omonia* won three seats, and the Committee of Veterans won one seat.

In the 17 runoffs and the Pogradec second round on April 7, the Democratic Party picked up 10 additional seats, the Party of Labor six and *Omonia* two. The Party of Labor won the one seat in Lushnje after a second-round vote on April 14. As a result, the configuration of the Assembly looks as follows:

Party	Seats Won	Percentage of Seats
Party of Labor	169	67.6
Democratic Party	75	30.0
Omonia	5	2.0
Committee of Veterans	1	0.4
Total	250	100.0

Not apparent within the figures are several important aspects of the outcome. For example, there was a definite and, to some analysts, disturbing division between the results for the cities and the results for the countryside. The urban centers went overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party, while villages and rural areas remained faithful to the Party of Labor. The cause of this development was likely a concern in the countryside about the speed and scope of economic reform with a government formed by the Democratic Party. Clearly, the rural areas had developed over the years of communist rule a preference for stability, even if the current situation was not fully satisfactory, over the perceived risks involved in changing the system, even if those changes promised something much better.

Another cause was the probable intimidation of voters in the countryside, who have felt the degree of political change in Albania much less than the city dwellers of Tirane and other major cities and towns. The role of the still entrenched local Party of Labor bosses in this regard, a problem in other countries going through similar transitions as well, was unclear but in all likelihood important in maintaining support for the ruling party.

While the Party of Labor overall achieved a key two-thirds majority in the Assembly, some of the top Government leaders, including President Alia, Foreign Minister Muhamet Kapllani and former Education Minister Skender Gjinushi lost their election bids. Prime Minister Fatos Nano won his seat but only after the runoff elections. Rather than choosing safe zones in the countryside, many of the Government leaders ran for zones within the capital of Tirane. Ramiz Alia ran in the same zone in Tirane in which the Labor Party First Secretary has traditionally run; to have done otherwise would have been perceived as an admission of vulnerability and therefore a denial of the full legitimacy of the Party of Labor. There was concern prior to the election about Alia losing, as rumors spread of attempts to place a military barracks within his zone and in light of a well televised meeting the leader held with his constituents on March 29.

These developments left the ruling party in power but with its reformers seemingly weakened vis-a-vis hard-liners, such as Politburo member Xhelil Gjoni and former Prime Minister Adil Carcani, who ran, and won, in zones around the country. It was not clear after the elections whether this result meant a definite strengthening of the hard-line faction or whether Alia himself could still lead the country or the party. The ominous tone of a press conference the day after the elections by Gjoni, speaking for the Party of Labor, indicated that this at least temporarily may have happened.

Post-Election Developments

The election results had an immediate impact of the country. Despite recognized problems in terms of support in the countryside, and an acknowledgement that the elections were taking place in far less than free and fair conditions, the Democratic Party had expected to win. To not only the opposition leadership but the rank-and-file as well, the very thought of maintaining the Party of Labor in power, given its past brutality, was almost inconceivable. As one person commented, "if we have a choice and nevertheless elect the Communists, we deserve everything that we get afterwards."

Thus, the Labor Party victory came as a shock. Before the results were officially announced, the outcome was generally known, in part due to the fact that Democratic Party observers submitted tallies allowing the party in Tirane to get its own, fairly accurate results. Thousands immediately began to gather in front of the Democratic Party's headquarters in Tirane, and protests began elsewhere in the country. The number of applications for visas at foreign embassies immediately grew, with a crowd of at least 5,000 seeking to leave the country outside of the Greek Embassy. Another 1,000 were believed to have crossed into Greece illegally in the few days immediately after the elections. More than 300 Albanian Jews -- almost the entire Jewish population of the country -- have also left for Israel.

Protests against the results in the northern city of Shkoder, known for the anti-Communist sentiment of the population, became the most violent. Upon hearing the Gjoni press conference, during which he pledged that the Party of Labor would maintain its Marxist-Leninist orientation, thousands of Shkoder citizens took to the streets in protest. According to press reports, on April 2 army units fired directly upon demonstrators sitting in the city's main square, killing four of them and injuring dozens of others. Arben Broxi, a local Democratic Party leader who had intervened to try to calm the situation, was among those killed when he was shot in the back, allegedly by someone in the city's Party of Labor headquarters. The enraged crowd then attacked and set on fire armored personnel carriers before storming and sacking the Party headquarters.

Violence erupted in Tirane, Durres and other cities as well, where warning shots were fired in the air and protesters were beaten with truncheons. One 14-year old, Mikel Laro, died of injuries resulting from being beaten by police in Tirane. More than 50,000 attended the April 3 funeral of those killed in Shkoder, and, to protest the violence, the Democratic Party leadership called for a 24-hour general strike on April 4, which was at least partially successful. Sali Berisha and the Democratic Party leadership, while condemning the violence, nevertheless called for calm. Some Democratic Party supporters, however, reportedly harassed rural residents in several districts, accusing them of costing the Democratic Party the election. The Democratic Party threatened to boycott the Assembly until those responsible for the killings in Shkoder were named, and it did boycott when the Assembly convened on April 15. Its 75 delegates did attend the April 17 session, however, and held a moment of silence for those who were killed in the Shkoder protests.

Reacting to the election results, the Democratic Party complained about great disparities in the population of electoral zones, and, on election day, of reported intimidation of voters in the countryside, unsealed ballot boxes and pictures of Ramiz Alia at polling stations. Party spokesman Genc Pollo also reported that, a few days after the elections, a bomb exploded at the home of the local Democratic Party leader in the southern city of Sirande, and another had been found at the party headquarters in Elbasan. Later, the home of a local Democratic Party official was set on fire in Tirane. In the runoff elections, the Democratic Party later said, there were further irregularities, including in the zone from which Fatos Nano, the Prime Minister, won a seat. There, soldiers were allegedly able to vote more than once.

Among the first items to be considered by the new Assembly is a new draft constitution which has been circulated by the Party of Labor for discussion. It changes the name of the country, currently the communistic "Peoples Socialist Republic of Albania," to simply the "Republic of Albania." It also contains new language on respect for human rights in the country. At the same time, it retains some vestiges of the past, such as maintaining the existence of party cells in some government offices. More worrisome, however, is its language on the powers of the new President of the country, which have been characterized as "sweeping." Although he lost his election bid, Ramiz Alia seems to have held his power base within the Party of Labor and is expected to stay on as President of Albania.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Fatos Nano, having won his seat in the runoff elections on April 7, said that members of the opposition would be asked to join the Party of Labor in forming a government "coalition of experts." The Democratic Party, however, has said that it would not join any coalition with the Communists but would instead work as an opposition fighting for democratic political reform and rapid economic changes.

CONCLUSION

The March-April 1991 elections in Albania were part of a relatively new but rapidly developing process of democratization in Albania, fueled primarily by popular discontent with the existing economic and political situation. The election process, in many respects, fell short of international standards for free and fair elections, such as those described in the concluding document of the Copenhagen Human Dimension Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Nevertheless, the holding of elections was an advance for democracy in Albania.

It remains to be seen whether the election results can be similarly described. While Labor Party leaders began the post election period with disturbing statements and actions, there will be, for the first time in decades, an opposition in the People's Assembly. Moreover, there are predictions that the Party of Labor, scheduled to hold a Party Congress in coming months, itself will divide as a result of internal polarization between reformers and hard-liners, which could lead to new Assembly elections sometime in the near future. In addition, local elections may be moved forward to sometime later in 1991.

The key question, however, is whether the Albanian population is willing to wait for further changes, especially if it is uncertain, with the Party of Labor still in power, that these changes will be taking place. Additional efforts by masses of people to leave the country, and further unrest, are very possible in the short term if the new Government does not act quickly to meet growing popular expectations.